

Let's take control
of our lives
and live for
pleasure not pain.

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I DIDN'T GO TO
SCHOOL TODAY...



...I DON'T THINK
I'LL GO TOMORROW

YOUTH
LIBERATION
NOW
ISSUE #4
Winter 2023

I just turned 18. I've been making this zine since I was 15. When I started, I had only been unschooling for a few months. The loathing and vitriol I felt towards public school was raw on my tongue. I had just spent 9th grade in a school I hated, desperately looking for a way out. My love of freedom and distaste of the institution was personal and palpable. With time, the wounds have partially healed. School feels a little more distant, a little less pressing. Now, I'm on my third school free year, and I can say leaving school was one of the best decisions I've ever made.



This issue of Youth Liberation Now explores the connections between anarchism and unschooling. The two are perhaps a bit like trees planted side by side. They have differences in how their branches curve and in the pattern of their bark. They have differences in how their leaves sway in the sunlight. But beneath the topsoil and leafy mulch, their roots intertwine.

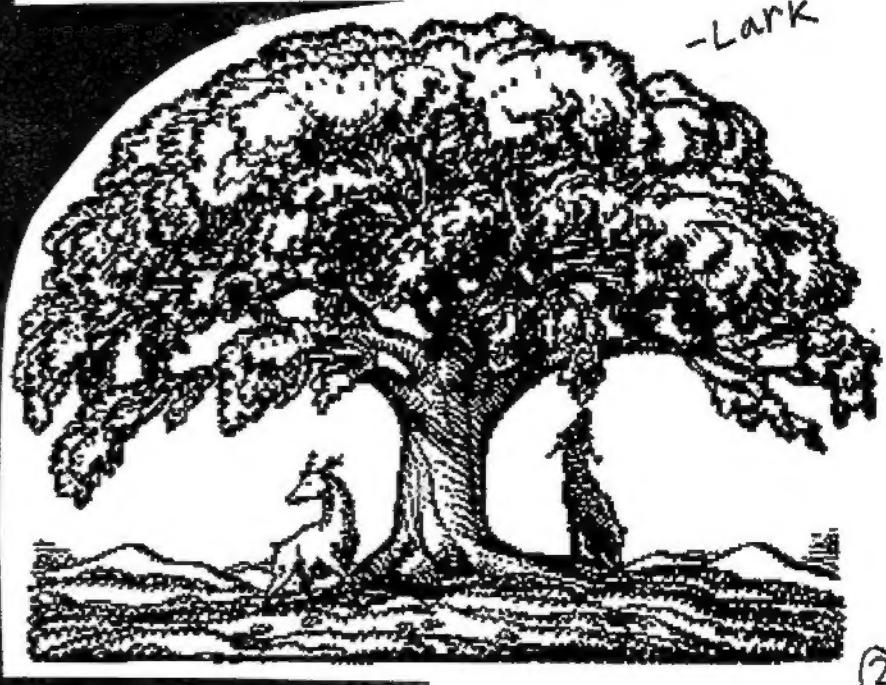
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Unschooling, self-directed education, is historically an anarchist's game. It is also a practice of indigenous people and working class people. For hundreds of years anarchists have questioned how to educate young people in a just and fair way. Some of the earliest formal examples of self-directed education were from self proclaimed anarchists. Before democratic schools spread to the United States there were the Modern Schools of the anarchist martyr Francisco Ferrer.

If you're already an anarchist and don't know much about youth liberation and liberatory education, I hope this seeds something new within you. If you're an unschooler who doesn't know much about anarchism, I hope this helps you realize that you probably already understand and practice anarchism everyday. I hope it inspires you to explore, invent, and investigate your beliefs about politics and education.

Thank you to everyone who submitted and everyone else who helped in making this issue ❤️❤️❤️

-Lark



(2)

It Isn't Idealism If It IS Lived: Six reflections on three years of unschooling

I. by Lark

What would happen if we abolished schools?

Perhaps the world would be a little freer. Perhaps people would learn everything they need from everyday life. Perhaps they would believe a little less in institutions and a little more in themselves. Maybe they would find their own place in the universe outside the usual white, western, capitalist confines.

Some people are already living this way. I like to think I am. Slowly, I'm trying to build a life without school, without trauma embedded deep within my muscle and bone. I'm trying to scrape together who I was before school and recreate myself. Differentiating between what is my voice talking and what is school's voice is difficult work. Is my anxiety mine, or is it school's? How do I begin to form that boundary?

My whole life, I've questioned my schooling. I questioned the progressive school I went to and the brutality of being in public school. Often, something deep down felt wrong. A malaise of anxiety would settle over me. I dreaded waking up in the morning. For a while after I stopped going to school, the morning dawn felt traumatic. I would wake up at 7 AM and look at the dusky blue light outside. All I could think of was ten years of waking up before my body's

natural instinct. All I could feel was a heaviness in my stomach.

I left school for good after 9th grade. Now, I'm in my third year as an unschooler. For the past three years, I've been free. What have I done? Well, for the last few days, I've been on picket lines. I've engaged with my community in the small ways I can. I've researched radical history, made art, and written about what I care about (rather than doing so for others). I've fallen in love and made deep connections with the people around me. I'm happier than I was in school most of the time. And I see a future surrounded by loved ones, doing the work I want to do.

Over my years of thinking about schooling and unschooling, some specific thoughts continually drift into my mind. The following are a handful of them, pulled from my mind and memories of conversations.

II.

Most people have a fundamental misunderstanding of how learning truly happens. This is not because of ignorance. It's because most people went to school. School tells us that learning cannot happen without teachers, classes, bells, and tests. The idea that *learning is school* is drilled into you from the moment you enter the institution. And yet, it's completely untrue.

The reality is that people are perfectly able to educate themselves. We are not designed to need school, no matter what we are told. We are not designed to sit at desks at six

years old or memorize irrelevant information. We are not designed to take tests and compete against one another. We are not meant to be in a space with only same-age peers eight hours a day, five days a week.

What we are designed to do is learn through play. We are designed to run, skip, dance, and jump. We are designed to laugh, sing, and yell. We are designed to live happy, whole, vibrant lives. We know how to draw useful information from the world around us. If a child plays in a stream, they are learning biology (finding and naming animals they see), physics (how to find their center of balance walking over uneven stones), and art (the bubbling of the water and its rich colors). Every day, you absorb information from conversations, the things you read, and any information you encounter. You learn perfectly well without school all of the time.

We are designed so perfectly to learn. Humans love learning innately, naturally. Learning is like lungs expanding and water flowing. It is like the winter wind and the summer rain. This learning part of us is always with us. Our minds are sharp and inquisitive. We seek patterns and answers to questions all day, every day. So, we learn every moment of every day. Learning is not school. Learning is life.

*A thought experiment for those who went to/are in school:
What if you hadn't gone to school? What if, instead, you were given the resources, community, and support to explore whatever you were passionate about as a child and teen (or now, as a young person in a traditional school)? Where would you be now? How*

would your life be different? How would your relationship with your parents and authority be changed?

III.

How do I define unschooling? This is something I've often thought about.

When people first hear about unschooling, they often want an immediate answer to the question, "What do unschoolers do all day?" But an answer to this question is not a useful definition of unschooling. Unschooling is not defined by *what you do as an unschooler* since that is ever-changing for every person. It is defined as *living without school*. What fills that gap of school-less-ness is different for every single person. What I do as an unschooler probably looks very different from what another randomly chosen unschooler does. I am an individual with unique interests and experiences, different from another person's unique interests and experiences.

Unschooling is about opting out of school. It's a set of values and practices that you explore outside of schooling. It is exploring what you are most passionate about as an individual. It is using the learning methods that work best for you. It is filling your life with work that makes it meaningful (which probably looks very different from the work that makes *my* life meaningful). It is living free from any forced, non-consensual education. Unschooling is living as if school has already been abolished.

(6)

IV.

Beyond unschooling, how do I define liberatory education at a broader level? I believe that liberatory education should be consensual, respectful, inclusive, directly democratic, and should allow young people autonomy. Consent is the most essential aspect. It serves as the foundation for everything else to grow from.

Without a young person's consent, even the most progressive education falls flat. What's the point when you don't want to be there? It's the same benevolent yet condescending adult voices and the same lack of choice and control. It is often the same inability to listen to your body's needs, to eat when you're hungry, drink when you're thirsty, and use the bathroom when you need to.

Even if you're given a little freedom around these things, being forced to come to a space every day, whether you would like to or not, is damaging. It taints everything else about your education. It is hurtful to be forced into an environment and told that you have no other options. Non-consent means force. It means there is some authority putting you in your place, someone dragging you to school, and someone keeping you there.

Slowly, you become accustomed to this domination. It spreads to every other part of your life. You learn to be subordinate and dominate others. It seeps into your skin, muscles, and marrow until it's all you know. In this way, compulsory education is not liberatory. School is why we have a world of people who can't imagine true freedom.

①

V.

I don't think what I do as an unschooler would mean much if I didn't share it with other young people. I don't think it would mean much without this zine. Individually practicing unschooling is admittedly not the solution for collective liberation. It has been an opportunity for personal autonomy and immense healing (which helps me be a better part of my community), but it is not some grand liberatory gesture to unschool as one singular white person.

Unschooling is worthless as a tool for liberation when it isn't explicitly inclusive and community-based. And unfortunately, a lot of unschoolers don't think about this. They are comfortable, white, and upper or middle class. But when unschooling is community-based, diverse, and intentional, it's powerful. It's a way of divesting from oppressive systems. Democratic, self-directed education should be easily accessible to everyone. Slowly, people are beginning to realize this.

I came into unschooling from this perspective at 14. I read essays about decolonizing school and sought out writing about unschooling from people of color. It felt important to me. It reached the tender core of my ideas about creating a better world. I realized that unschooling was about so much more than just education. It could be a tool for creating community and solidarity. It could actually be a way to create a freer world.



VI.

Unschooling is prefigurative politics. We can create communities here and now that model ideal ways of relating to each other. We can live what we ultimately want to expand to the whole of society. Anarchism is not a far-off future. We are deeply mistaken when we think it is. Anarchism is an everyday practice. It addresses issues directly and autonomously. Like giving food to unhoused people, breaking down hierarchies in your relationships, creating free libraries of books and tools, freely sharing information through art and zines, and occupying universities and commons.

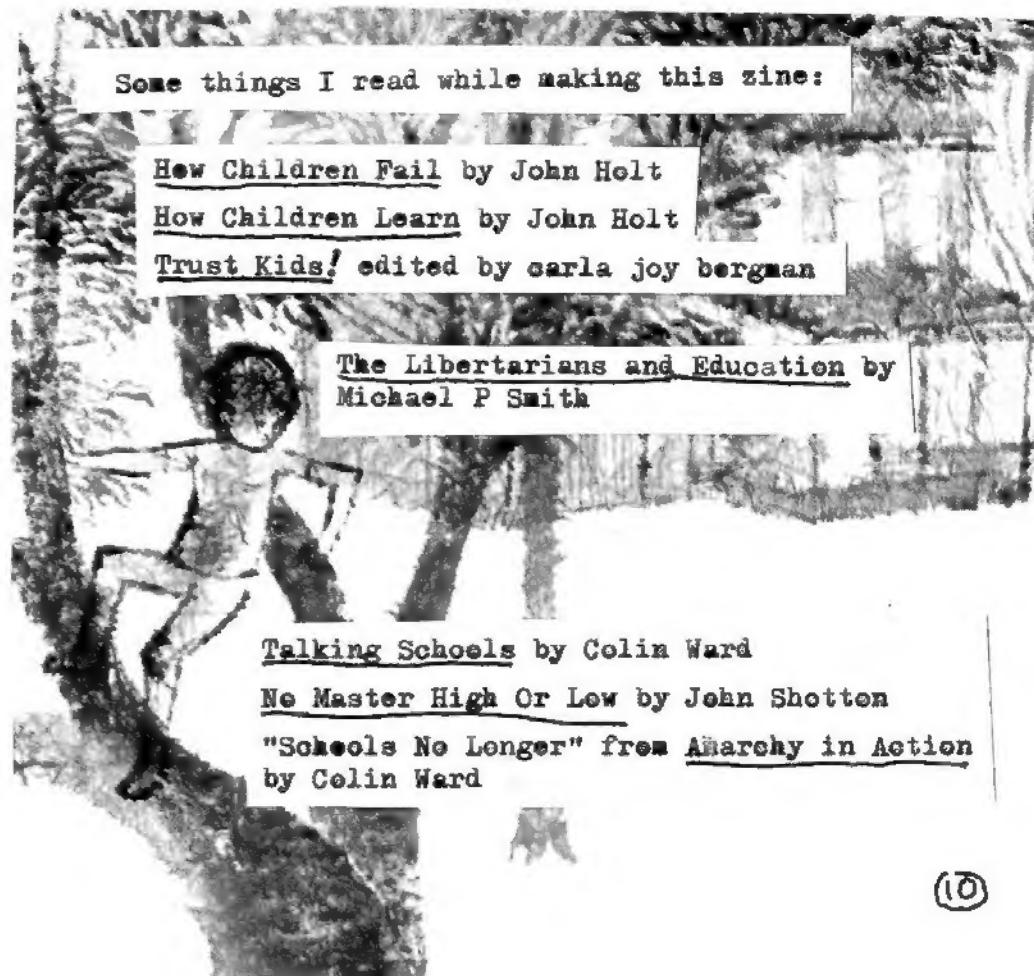
Unschooling models what a more just, free world would look like every day. It models a world with fewer hierarchies and more freedom. Education has been important to anarchists for a long time. And for a good reason. Ultimately, the way we treat children determines a lot about the way our society functions. Treating children as inferior demonstrates to them a world of hierarchies. They grow up to believe that dominating people is okay. Treating children with respect and trust models a world where everyone is liberated.

It's empowering to experience liberatory education. I know this because I've experienced it. Having mentors and teachers I consensually choose to work with is powerful. It's powerful to live my life the way I want to at an age where most people can't. It's powerful to be fully trusted and respected.

(9)

My deepest desire is for every young person to experience, at the very least, a glimpse of this feeling. It's intoxicating and freeing. It's why I make this zine. My biggest hope is that you can resist school in whatever way you can. I know that dropping out is not a desirable option for everyone. There are so many ways that we can resist school together. Create spaces in community with other people outside of school. Remove yourself from school-ish thinking.

The point is to really begin. Start making cracks in the wall. Live as if school has already been abolished.



(10)

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

as a means of

YOUTH LIBERATION

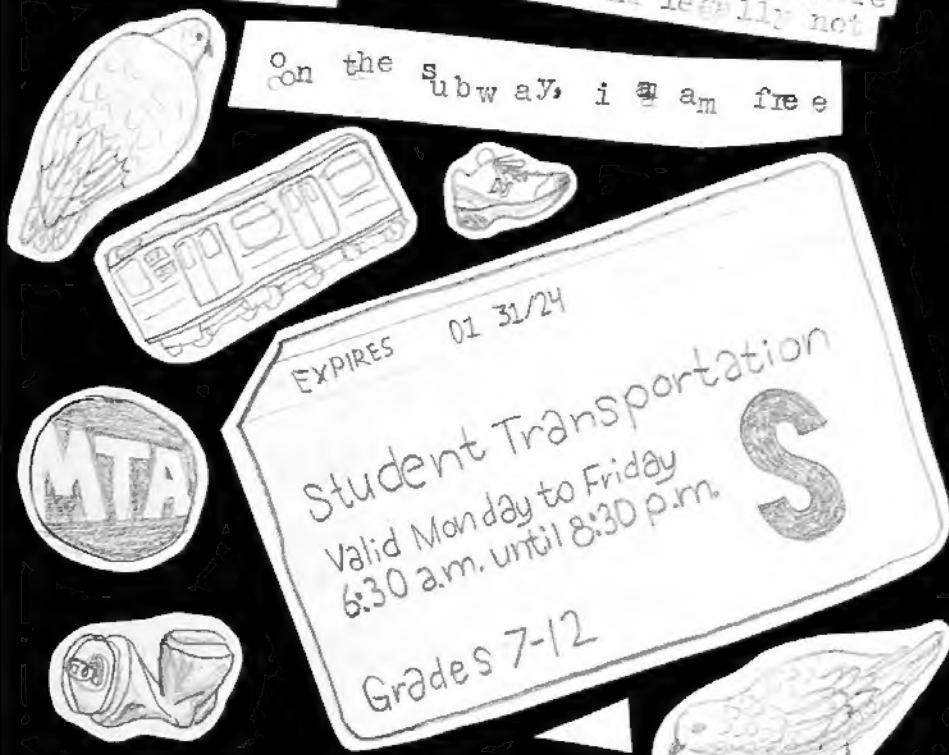
written & drawn by zoe

@zoes_arts_crafts

i don't go to school, i'm home/unschooled, so the train takes me wherever i want to during the day. museums, parks, protests, classes, and gatherings.

not relying on parents to take you everywhere not relying on a car, which i am legally not allowed to drive

on the subway, i am free



EXPIRES 01/31/24
Student Transportation
Valid Monday to Friday
6:30 a.m. until 8:30 p.m.
Grades 7-12

Do not hold door

i 100 000 000 000 cover the subway



i am 16, so i get a student pass. three free rides on weekdays. but it's a limited freedom. they just give you enough to travel to school, one afterschool program, and home again. they think these are the only places kids belong. home. school. playground. afterschool program. keeping us out of the real world, locked into this three-ride triangle.

i saw, read, listen to music, or just look out the window and watch the lights in the tunnels fly by. or stare at shoes. sometimes it takes a while for me to get places, but i think of the journey not as the in-between, but something that can also be enjoyable.

the NYC subway system is pretty great, but has a long way to go before it's equitable for everyone.



Do not lean on door

LOUISE MICHEL

born 1830

death 1905



Revolutionary

School teacher

Auto-didact

Anarchist feminist

Fought on the barricades during the Paris commune

Poet + Author

modern schools were:
• secular
• private
• national
• libertarian

"The task of teachers, those obscure soldiers of civilization, is to give the people the intellectual means to revolt."

(13)

FRANCISCO FERRER

born 1859

death 1909



Spanish anarchist martyr and teacher

Founded the first modern school

or Escuela moderna

Against state and church controlled schools

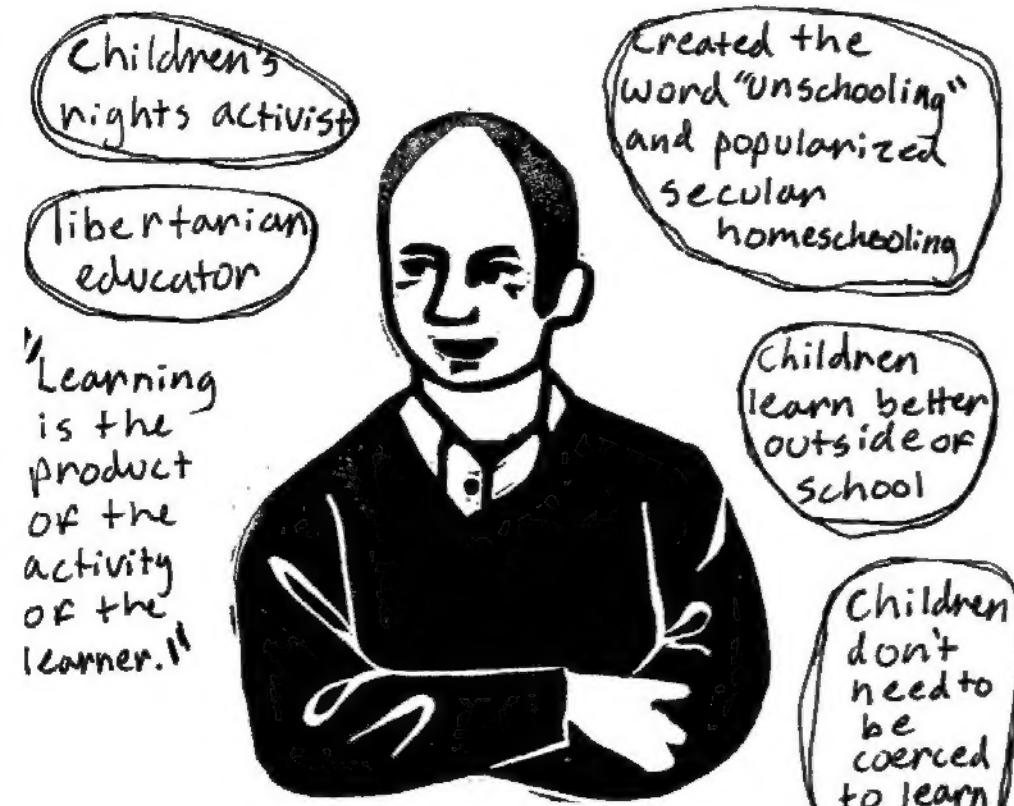
Following his execution, his modern schools inspired the first worldwide movement of democratic education.

"Governments have ever been known to hold a high hand over the education of the people. They know, better than any one else, that their power is based almost entirely on the school."

(14)

JOHN HOLT

born 1923 death 1985



“A life worth living,
and work worth doing—
that is what I want
for children (and all people),
not just, or not even,
something called ‘a better education.’”

Manifesto of a High School Dropout by Osiris Turner

We are angry. We are hurt and we are betrayed and we are angry. We have been robbed of our innocence and we have been robbed of our right to live and play and to learn of the world wholly and truly and viscerally and we are fucking angry. We have been stripped of sovereignty over ourselves and our time all in favor of breaking our spirit and molding us into docile, obedient nobodys, ready to bend to the will of the State.

“‘Predigested food’ should be inscribed over every hall of learning as a warning to all who do not wish to lose their own personalities and their original sense of judgment, who, instead, would be content with a large amount of empty and shallow shells.”

So says Emma Goldman in her essay entitled *The Child and its Enemies*, and she could not be more correct. Eight hours a day we must sit and we must shut up and we must copy down and spit back up hours and hours and hours of largely irrelevant busywork — information? Hardly. It is, if anything, useful only to the State in that it is propaganda designed to sell us a lie and suck the life and love and learning right out of us.

We only have compulsory education in the American Empire because it serves the *State* to have a population of brainwashed busybodies readily at hand to use as labor (when labor cannot be outsourced for cheaper) to power their Leviathan. They want you to submit to them; “another cog in the murder machine,” if you will.

Your government hates you. They want you dead inside to do their bidding — god forbid you are too unruly or inquisitive — so they indoctrinate you young in the hopes of quelling your spirit. White-picket-fence-suburbia is a lie and they hope you don’t know that until it’s too late and you’re selling your labor for scraps.

You likely have heard such sentiments before, and if you are still skeptical of their legitimacy, we urge you to take a moment and really consider them. Individual persons are not, in fact, responsible for rotten systemic injustices. You are not to blame for the ills that afflict this Planet and its creatures, as they would love you to believe. The Amazon is not any more on fire because you're not a vegan, nor is it any less on fire if you are. They are deflecting the blame onto you so they can continue to seize dominion over this Earth by force and squeeze her riches from her for their mantelpieces and dragon-hoards.

Our liberation is a danger to them so our State-Education becomes imperative. If we do not sit still they give us amphetamine and tell us we are sick. If we are overwhelmed with hopelessness at the state of the world we have no choice but to inherit they give us SSRIs and tell us again that we are sick. If we are anxious or manic or despondent or hyperactive or divergent in any way they drug us and tell us we are sick and we need fixing and again they deflect responsibility onto us. It is despicable to hold us in servitude under threat of starvation and houselessness and still demand we be complacent.

Humankind is being brought to a reckoning of unprecedented scale. Already in Iran they are revolting, and we here should follow suit. The American Empire boasts the highest incarceration rate by a wide margin, shootings and police violence are rampant, wealth inequality here today is more drastic than in France during their revolution, not to mention this land is stolen land and this nation was built by stolen people and still we are content to go about our lives? No! We must take up arms against this imperial plutocratic oligarchy masquerading as a by-the-people-for-the people democracy and render it asunder; we must free ourselves and our comrades and rebuild a new society.

(17)

The Nguzo Saba delineates an excellent model for both an anarchist praxis and a post-capitalist society. The key tenets of this model are as follows:

Umoja: unity. Instead of sowing derision and pitting ourselves against each other, we must strive to be unified in our efforts against our common enemy. Revolutionary acts need not be violent — not that we wholly condemn violence — revolution can be building community and supporting our comrades. Revolution can be acts of love — not to say that love need be demure and docile — demanding change, demanding sovereignty, demanding *action*.

Kujichagulia: self-determination. Any movement requires people working together collectively to work for change. Determination and resilience are vital in a revolution, especially one of this caliber, but Kujichagulia specifically refers to the right of a people to dictate their identities and destinies for themselves. This level of sovereignty is seldom enjoyed by historically disenfranchised populations, and it is vital that we reclaim it.

Ujima: collective work and responsibility. No matter who you are, you did not come from nothing. No one can exist in isolation. All living beings are ultimately part of the same big ecosystem and to keep it running and living and working at all we all must do our part. Everyone should be able to rely on their comrades to support them in their pursuits and endeavors. We all have something valuable to contribute, and we need to support each other.

Ujamaa: cooperative economics. Ujamaa is effectively just small-scale communism in a capitalist society. It means putting money and financial aid into your community, and it is a wonderful act of rebellion. Black people have been historically kept poor by the American Empire. This tenet encourages us to support our people with the money that we make and to practice compassion and community care.

(18)

Kuumba: creativity. Creativity is stifled under State-Education (and capitalism in general, really), so it is absolutely vital that we keep our creative spirits alive. This is much easier said than done due to how our culture has been cultivated to favor conformity over originality; freedom of thought and freedom of expression in any real, practical sense is never desired by Sovereign Power lest someone call them into scrutiny.

Nia: purpose. What is your purpose? Many people ponder this question their whole lives. We don't have the answer for you. Only you can decide what you're meant to do. But that won't stop people from trying to make that decision for you, whether it be your parents, your teachers, your friends, or even just society in general. You could be taking instructions about how to live your life without even knowing. Determine for yourself what your purpose is and how you can be of service.

Imani: faith. Faith in a better tomorrow. Faith in the future. Faith in ourselves. Faith is essential in the fight for change; without it we can never conceive of a time past a destitute world filled with strife. It carried the revolutionaries of the past as much as it does the revolutionaries of today. The future seems bleak, and the urge to succumb to apathy can be overwhelming. But that is exactly what they want you to do. Many noble endeavors have been abandoned to hopelessness, but if we are perseverant and resolute we will succeed.

These tenets, of course, are in direct conflict with the very concept of State-Education. So, naturally, we turn away from the propaganda machine in favor of self-directed study. In lieu of a rigid curriculum, we learn what we want to learn, how and when we like. We organize freely with our peers and engage in pragmatic, relevant, empirical learning experiences that serve ourselves and our wider communities. We promote radical change and advocate for class struggle and the dismantling of illegitimate power. We're fucking pissed and we're gonna do something about it.

HOW TO DIRECT YOUR OWN EDUCATION

So, what if you want to leave school? Or maybe just make your life a little less school-ish? Stuck in an environment where you're unhappy, and have an inkling deep down that there's something out there that would work better for you?

Here is a list of resources that can start your exploration towards what might work best for you:

I want to unschool!

- The Teenage Liberation Handbook by Grace Llewellyn is engagingly written for young people and covers everything you could possibly want to know about leaving school.
- The Art of Self Directed Learning and College Without High School by Blake Boles. Blake has many other great resources online.
- To convince on the fence parents, and perhaps yourself (I had to do a bit of that) see A Survey of Grown Unschoolers by Peter Gray.
- Anything by John Holt for enjoyable and accessible reading about unschooling and its origins.

What about something that's less homeschoo-l-y?
I need to see people!

• Explore: democratic or free schools, liberated learners centers, and agile learning centers. There are lots of interesting models that people are exploring and practicing.

• For specific locations (to see if there's a "school" near you) look at the Alliance for Self-directed Education's map of locations or AERO's map of locations.

• If there is not a learning center in your area AERO (Alternative Education Resource Organization) has resources to help you start one. Of course you can also get together with other young people and start something DIY. Parents aren't the only ones who can start co-ops.

• alternativestoschool.com has good information on a wide range of options.

I'm in school and want or need to stay, but I want to deschool some aspects of my life.

• Deschooling Our Lives and Everywhere All the Time by Matt Hern

• Deschooling Society by Ivan Illich for something more theoretical (but still excellent).

• The Purple Thistle Center served as a center for young people both in and out of school to freely share knowledge and self-direct their learning outside of school. Perhaps it could serve as an inspiration to create a deschooling center yourself.

• Create a discussion group with other young people to talk seriously about how school (and adultism in general) has harmed you. Openly talking about and acknowledging school's harm is the first step to deschooling your life.

I want to drop out!

• Dropping Out (for students) is a good zine about dropping out you can find on Crimethinc's website.

• Stay Solid! A Radical Handbook for Youth, has a good section on alternatives to school, including dropping out.

How does self-directed education serve marginalized communities?

• Raising Free People by Akilah S Richards describes how unschooling can be used as a tool for liberation.

• Schooling the World by Carol Black is a documentary on education and colonization.

• Land as Pedagogy by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson is a fantastic essay on indigenous self-directed education.

• Ours First an essay by Dr. Kelly Limes-Taylor Henderson eloquently describes how self-directed education is a long time practice of marginalized people.

THE CHILD AND ITS ENEMIES

by Emma Goldman

Is the child to be considered as an individuality, or as an object to be moulded according to the whims and fancies of those about it? This seems to me to be the most important question to be answered by parents and educators. And whether the child is to grow from within, whether all that craves expression will be permitted to come forth toward the light of day; or whether it is to be kneaded like dough through external forces, depends upon the proper answer to this vital question.

The longing of the best and noblest of our times makes for the strongest individualities. Every sensitive being abhors the idea of being treated as a mere machine or as a mere parrot of conventionality and respectability, the human being craves recognition of his kind.

It must be borne in mind that it is through the channel of the child that the development of the mature man must go, and that the present ideas of the educating or training of the latter in the school and the family — even the family of the liberal or radical — are such as to stifle the natural growth of the child.

Every institution of our day, the family, the State, our moral codes, sees in every strong, beautiful, uncompromising personality a deadly enemy; therefore every effort is being made to cramp human emotion and originality of thought in the individual into a straight-jacket from its earliest infancy; or to shape every human being according to one pattern; not into a well-rounded individuality, but into a patient work slave, professional

automaton, tax-paying citizen, or righteous moralist. If one, nevertheless, meets with real spontaneity (which, by the way, is a rare treat,) it is not due to our method of rearing or educating the child: the personality often asserts itself, regardless of official and family barriers. Such a discovery should be celebrated as an unusual event, since the obstacles placed in the way of growth and development of character are so numerous that it must be considered a miracle if it retains its strength and beauty and survives the various attempts at crippling that which is most essential to it.

...

The ideal of the average pedagogist is not a complete, well-rounded, original being; rather does he seek that the result of his art of pedagogy shall be automatons of flesh and blood, to best fit into the treadmill of society and the emptiness and dullness of our lives. Every home, school, college and university stands for dry, cold utilitarianism, flooding the brain of the pupil with a tremendous amount of ideas, handed down from generations past. "Facts and data," as they are called, constitute a lot of information, well enough perhaps to maintain every form of authority and to create much awe for the importance of possession, but only a great handicap to a true understanding of the human soul and its place in the world.

Truths dead and forgotten long ago, conceptions of the world and its people, covered with mould, even during the times of our grandmothers, are being hammered into the heads of our young generation. Eternal change, thousandfold variations, continual innovation are the essence of life. Professional pedagogy knows nothing of it, the systems of education are being arranged into files, classified and numbered. They lack the strong fertile seed

which, falling on rich soil, enables them to grow to great heights, they are worn and incapable of awakening spontaneity of character. Instructors and teachers, with dead souls, operate with dead values. Quantity is forced to take the place of quality. The consequences thereof are inevitable.

In whatever direction one turns, eagerly searching for human beings who do not measure ideas and emotions with the yardstick of expediency, one is confronted with the products, the herdlike drilling instead of the result of spontaneous and innate characteristics working themselves out in freedom.

"No traces now I see
Whatever of a spirit's agency.
'Tis drilling, nothing more."

These words of Faust fit our methods of pedagogy perfectly. Take, for instance, the way history is being taught in our schools. See how the events of the world become like a cheap puppet show, where a few wire-pullers are supposed to have directed the course of development of the entire human race.

And the history of our own nation! Was it not chosen by Providence to become the leading nation on earth? And does it not tower mountain high over other nations? Is it not the gem of the ocean? Is it not incomparably virtuous, ideal and brave? The result of such ridiculous teaching is a dull, shallow patriotism, blind to its own limitations, with bull-like stubbornness, utterly incapable of judging of the capacities of other nations. This is the way the spirit of youth is emasculated, deadened through an over-estimation of one's own value. No wonder public opinion can be so easily manufactured.

NO MORE LATIN

NO MORE FRENCH

NO MORE SITTING ON

A HARD SCHOOL BENCH

